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ABSTRACT

Retention rates for black students at predominantly white campuses are consistently and disappointingly low, much more so than for white students. There is some evidence for black males that noncognitive variables are more predictive of academic success than the more traditionally used cognitive variables. In this intervention which was designed to improve retention, a workshop series was conducted focusing on the following noncognitive variables: (1) having strong self-concept; (2) having potential to appraise oneself realistically; (3) ability to understand and deal with racism; (4) preferring long-term goals over short-term goals; (5) having a strong support person; (6) having had leadership experience before going to college; (7) having a well-defined career goal; and (8) having demonstrated some kind of community service. Subjects were black male second-semester freshmen, 15 of whom participated in at least one workshop (treatment group), 20 of whom were interested but did not show (no-show group), and 49 of whom were never contacted (control group.) The results indicated that students who participated in at least one workshop did not differ significantly in retention rate from either those who indicated interest but no-showed or from the control group. Future applications should be preceded by identification of students who have low scores on several non-cognitive variables. (ABL)

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College Park, Maryland

A Noncognitive Workshop Series for Black Male Freshmen

Research Report # 15-89

The Counseling Center Retention Study Group*

Vivian Boyd, Steven Carstens, Patricia Hunt,
Stanley Hunt, Thomas Magoon, Jean McDevitt

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Computer time for this project has been provided in full
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A Noncognitive Workshop Series for Black Male Freshmen

The Counseling Center Retention Study Group
The University of Maryland College Park

Research Report #15-89

Summary

During the Spring 1987 semester, a workshop series consisting of an introductory session and seven group sessions, designed after the eight noncognitive variables developed and researched by Tracey and Sedlacek (1985) and shown to be a predictor of academic retention for black males in predominantly white institutions, was offered to black second semester freshmen. Fifteen students participated in at least one of the sessions, and comprised the treatment group. Twenty indicated an interest in participating but did not show for the workshop, and comprised the no-show group. Forty-nine uncontacted students comprised the control group.

Students who participated in at least one session of the workshop did not differ significantly from either those who indicated interest but no-showed or from the control group. Future applications of the noncognitive workshop should be preceded by identification of a sample of black male freshmen who have low scores on several variables measured by the Noncognitive Questionnaire.

A Noncognitive Workshop Series for Black Male Freshmen

The Counseling Center Retention Study Group*

The University of Maryland College Park

Retention rates for black students at predominantly white campuses are consistently and disappointingly low - much more so than for white students. It is common for researchers studying the problem of attrition to examine cognitive variables such as high school GPA, SAT scores, and first semester college GPA for a relationship between such variables and academic persistence. There is some evidence that for black males, noncognitive variables are more predictive of academic success than the more traditionally used cognitive variables (Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985).

The eight non-cognitive variables developed by Sedlacek and Brooks (1972) and further researched by Tracey and Sedlacek (1985) are:

- having a strong self-concept
- having the potential to appraise oneself realistically
- being able to understand and deal with racism
- preferring long term goals over short term goals
- having a strong support person
- having had a leadership experience before going to college
- having a well-defined career goal
- having demonstrated some type of community service

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The Counseling Center Retention Study Group, concerned about the high number of black students who leave UMCP after their freshman year, designed a retention program based on these eight noncognitive variables.

METHOD

From a University-generated listing of all black second semester freshmen with local addresses and phone numbers, 49 names were randomly selected to serve as a nontreatment control group. The remaining 124 freshmen comprised the treatment group.

The treatment group was sent a letter in late January 1987 from the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, congratulating them on having completed their first semester at the University, alerting them that the second semester is a critical one for determining whether they will be able to move into their second academic year, and describing a research-based program designed to help black male freshmen overcome some of the problems which typically get in the way of success at college.

Two male counselors (one black, one white) who elected to run the workshops followed up the letter with a phone call, to answer questions and set up an initial individual interview. After this initial interview, students completed three instruments: the Brown-Holzman. the Epps, and the Noncognitive Questionnaire.

The first interview was to be followed by seven group sessions, modeled around each of the eight noncognitive variables.

Outcome Variables

Two outcome variables were examined in order to determine the effect of the workshop on subjects' academic retention rates:

1. Academic retention, defined as enrolled for a given semester;

2. Retention in good standing, defined as enrolled for a given semester and entering that semester with no academic action taken as a result of the previous semester.

All data concerning registration status and academic actions were obtained from University records. These variables were studied for four semesters subsequent to the semester of intervention.

RESULTS

Thirty-five students initially expressed interest in participating in the workshop. Of those, 20 never showed up for their scheduled first appointment; 10 students showed for the first session time; 2 students showed for the first two sessions; 2 students went to three sessions, and 1, to five sessions.

Table 1 shows the academic retention rates for three groupings: those who showed for at least one session (treatment), those who initially expressed interest but did not participate, and the controls. There are no significant differences among the three groups on retention rates during the four semesters studied, at the $p<.05$ level, using the chi square statistic.

Table 1.

Academic Retention Rates by Group

	Group						
	Treatment		No Shows		Controls		
Semester	n	%	n	%	n	%	p
initial n	15		20		49		
F '87	13	87	17	85	40	82	ns
S '88	10	67	16	80	34	69	ns
F '88	10	67	15	75	35	71	ns
S '89	10	67	14	70	34	69	ns

Table 2 shows rates of academic retention in good standing, by group. Again, there are no differences among the groups in rates of academic retention with satisfactory grades.

Table 2.

Academic Retention in Good Standing by Group

	Group						
	Treatment		No Shows		Controls		
Semester	n	%	n	%	n	%	p
initial n	15		20		49		
F '87	8	53	10	50	25	51	ns
S '88	8	53	10	50	24	49	ns
F '88	9	60	13	65	23	47	ns
S '89	9	60	11	55	25	51	ns

DISCUSSION

Results of this retention intervention were disappointing. Students who participated in at least one session of the workshop did not differ significantly from

those who indicated interest in the workshop but did not participate in its sessions, nor did they differ from the nontreatment control group. In other retention studies, students motivated voluntarily to engage in self-change efforts have typically had higher retention rates than students who declined to participate. Workshops leaders of the present study observed that the students they contacted by phone, and most of those who attended the first individual introductory session, were not reporting academic or social adjustment problems. Test results for those few who continued in the wiorkshop also indicated average or higher scores on almost all variables measured. One workshop leader, noting lower self-esteem scores on the NCQ, was informed by his students that the questionnaire was not accurate since they felt confident and comfortable with themselves. It seems, then, that the workshop goals, of improving students' areas of deficiency, were irrelevant to most participants, and possibly to many of those who agreed to participate but did not show for the first interview. Instead, men persisting in the workshop chose to discuss normal first-year adjustment issues. Future applications of the noncognitive workshop should be preceded by identification of a sample who have low scores on several variables on the NCQ.

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